

Re-Marc-able Landscapes

Marc-ante Landschappen

Liber Amicorum
Marc Antrop

EDS. VEERLE VAN EETVELDE,

MARJANNE SEVENANT, LISA VAN DE VELDE



Academia Press

Eekhout 2

9000 Gent

Tel. 09/233 80 88

Fax 09/233 14 09

Info@academiapress.be

www.academiapress.be

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Cultural heritage in Europe - engine for regional development

Georges Allaert en Hans Leinfelder

Ghent University, Centre for Mobility and Spatial Planning, Vrijdagmarkt 10/301, 9000 Ghent, Belgium

georges.allaert@ugent.be; hans.leinfelder@ugent.be

Abstract

CULTURED or 'Best Practice in the presentation and market-oriented valorisation of CULTURAL heritage as an instrument of REGIONAL Development' was a European partnership project within the framework of the Interreg IIIC programme, coordinated from January 2005 until December 2007 by Ghent University-Centre for Mobility and Spatial Planning. The project involved 14 partners from nine different European countries. The common problem definition of the project was that, besides preserving the story which cultural heritage has to tell through its history and former purpose, the reuse of cultural heritage could generate new sources of income for a region and deliver new dynamics. Based on this problem definition, the remit of the partnership was to identify suitable methods of market-oriented valorisation in different European regions. The objectives of the European Lisbon Agenda – in terms of job creation, knowledge and research production, investment in and development of innovative small-scale businesses, and added value – formed the basis of the 'Wheel of Cultured', a metaphorical representation of the theoretical methodological framework for the knowledge exchange. The Cultured-wheel allowed, for ten demonstration projects, a formatted synthesis of information on the four elements mentioned above and an assessment whether or not these four elements were in balance. The assessment of these demonstration projects finally resulted in recommendations for setting up successful projects concerning the reuse of built cultural heritage and in policy recommendations to make this reuse an engine or catalyst for regional development.

1. Introduction

It is only in the 1960s and 1970s – as a result of the first coordinated Belgian law on urbanism of March 29th 1962 and its inherent practical challenge to design the first regional zoning plans for the entire territory of Belgium – that spatial planning has become a 'real profession' in Flanders. As a consequence of the growing demand for educated planners and their experience in designing the zoning plans, both Ghent University and Katholieke Universiteit Leuven set up academic programmes in spatial planning in the beginning of the 1970s. The first twenty years, students successfully completing this programme were named 'licentiates in urbanism, spatial planning and development', referring to the fundamental relationship between planning and (regional) development.

In the 1990s, mainly due to changes in Flemish educational legislation, the title of the programme changed a few times. Anyhow, summarising the period 1990-2007, the two universities offered a unique inter-university programme with Ghent University focusing on 'advanced studies in spatial planning' and Katholieke Universiteit Leuven on 'specialised studies in urbanism and spatial planning'.

Today, forced by the European standardisation of academic programmes, Ghent University remains the only Flemish university to offer an initial 'master programme in urbanism and spatial planning',

addressing potential Flemish spatial planners, while Katholieke Universiteit Leuven is aiming for a worldwide audience with its 'international master programme in urbanism and strategic planning'.

It was especially in the second period described above – in the 1990s and the first years of the 21st century – that Marc Antrop had an important role to help the development and positioning of the spatial planning programme at Ghent University. Furthermore, during this period right until the day of his retirement, the necessity of his course on 'landscape science and landscape management' in this programme has never been subject to discussion. After all, it matched seamlessly with (and complemented) the already long-lasting regional (economic) planning expertise at Ghent University.

In this context, one should stress that Marc Antrop is a succesful autodidact in spatial planning. Although never really having studied spatial planning, he gradually managed to secure himself a position in the Flemish spatial planning world. Since most of the younger generation of Flemish spatial planners were students of Marc Antrop, his ideas and concepts daily affect today's Flemish spatial planning policy, especially the spatial planning policy for the more rural areas. But also his research on the so-called 'traditional landscapes' (Antrop et al., 1993, revised in Antrop et al., 2002; see also Antrop and Van Damme, 1995) in preparation of the first strategic spatial planning policy document for Flanders – the 'Spatial Structure Plan Flanders' (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 1997) – and the further elaboration of this concept in the 'landscape atlases' (see a.o. Hofkens and Roosens, 2001) have set a unique standard for current and future policy initiatives to integrate the landscape dimension into Flemish spatial planning. Fortunately for the coming generations of Flemish spatial planners, Marc Antrop's theoretical and practical knowledge has been recorded for eternity in two major standard works (Antrop, 1989 and Antrop, 2007).

Marc Antrop's ideas on landscape, cultural heritage and spatial planning have also inspired many other academic scholars, often related to other knowledge fields, to search for interrelations between their own knowledge field and landscape research. 'Interdisciplinarity' and 'transdisciplinarity' were key words in Marc Antrop's academic research vocabulary (Antrop and Rogge, 2006; see also Tress and Tress, 2001).

This contribution reports on a recent European Interreg IIIC knowledge exchange project on the relationship between the revalorisation of cultural heritage and regional development that has been coordinated by the Centre for Mobility and Spatial Planning of Ghent University (Anonymous, 2007). Although Marc Antrop has not been actively involved in this project, it will be clear that his ideas about the relationship between landscape, cultural heritage and spatial planning and 'his' two key words mentioned above played an essential role in approaching this relationship.

First, this contribution will situate the project and explain the theoretical methodological background. Secondly, its application in assessing demonstration projects will be illustrated and the results will be discussed. Finally, recommendations to set up and develop successful projects concerning the reuse of built cultural heritage will conclude the contribution.

2. Cultured

The 'Cultured' acronym stands for 'Best Practice in the presentation and market-oriented valorisation of CULTUral heritage as an instrument of REgional Development'. In practice, 'Cultured' stood for a European partnership project within the framework of the Interreg IIIC programme – and thus co-financed by the European Commission - which ran from January 2005 until December 2007. It involved 14 partners from nine European countries: two partners from Belgium/Flanders (Ghent University-Centre for Mobility and Spatial Planning; Flemish Ministry-Cultural Heritage Department); one partner each from Hungary (Somogy County Council), Ireland (Cork County Council), United Kingdom/Wales (Torfaen County Borough Council and Caerphilly County Borough Council), Italy (Pistoia Business Innovation Centre), Latvia (Kurzeme Tourism Association) and the Netherlands (Alterra Green World Research); three partners from Lithuania (Panevezys County Governors Administration; Vilnius Pedagogical University; Birzai District Municipality) and three partners from Spain (City Council of Ubeda; Local Development Agency of Bunol; Mallorca Regional Council).

The underlying assumption of the partnership was that much of the built cultural heritage in European nations has become redundant and has lost its function under the pressure of other spatial needs and socio-economic changes. But, besides preserving the story that this heritage has to tell through its history and former purpose, the reuse of buildings and constructions could generate new sources of income for a region and deliver new dynamics in terms of jobs, investment capacity, ... As a consequence, the successful reuse of built heritage could contribute to a region's image and strengthen its identity. Qualitative approaches to reuse built cultural heritage could help to reduce socio-economic disparities between regions and, as such, could play a significant role in stimulating regional development (Anonymous, 2007).

Based on this findings, the aim of the Cultured partnership was to identify suitable methods of market-oriented valorisation including the potential preservation of elements of built heritage in different European regions. The main challenge was to discover, analyse and expand upon inspiring approaches based on elements of the identity of each region. At the start, the key outcome of the project was considered to be a best practice guideline on how to use built heritage and cultural identity as instruments of regional development, preserving the building's historic integrity whilst using a market-led approach. In addition, a theoretical methodological framework was developed to explain underlying relations between heritage, identity and regional development. Other outcomes included innovative partner demonstration projects, a database to share experience between the partner countries on specific themes - such as policy, legislation, restoration issues and added value - and the stimulation of discussion and networking.

3. Theoretical methodological background – Wheel of Cultured

Cultural heritage – and hence the reuse of old constructions such as buildings and infrastructure – is a matter of interpretation of the past. Two features are prominent in this interpretation: first, the importance of the past as a resource or the ability to keep the history of a place alive even after a building or a construction has lost its function; secondly, the opportunity to make heritage work as a development option for a region. In this context, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1998:149) states that: "Cultural heritage is a new mode of cultural production in the present that has a resource to the past." And

Ashworth (2006:18) is even more specific: "Heritage is a process, not a category of resources (...) As a process it can be a development option. Heritage can without contradiction be either an objective of development or an instrument in furthering it."

This idea on cultural heritage has also been adopted by European policy makers, like the 'framework' convention on cultural heritage of the Council of Europe (Faro, 2005), integrating the convention on the protection of architectural heritage (Granada, 1985), the convention on the protection of archaeological heritage (Malta, 1992) and the landscape convention (Florence, 2000). In the European Spatial Development Perspective (Potsdam, 1999), cultural (and natural) heritage is identified as one of the four major areas that interact with the spatial development of the European Union. Moreover, the prudent management of the cultural heritage is considered as one of the three key issues. The covering Lisbon Agenda of the European Union (March 2000) stresses innovation, knowledge and the creation of jobs as central pillars to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, capable of sustainable economic growth and of greater social cohesion. In this context, creating innovation through a respectful reuse of built cultural heritage is considered to be a successful way to meet various objectives of the Lisbon Strategy of the European Union for a more competitive Europe (2000) in terms of job creation, knowledge and research production, investment in and development of innovative small-scale businesses, and added value.

3.1. Wheel of Cultured

The objectives of the Lisbon Agenda also formed the basis of the 'Wheel of Cultured', a metaphorical representation of the theoretical methodological framework of the knowledge exchange project (figure 1). The wheel is a schematic and simplified interpretation of the complex underlying relationship between 'cultural heritage' and 'regional development'. It also illustrates the interface function of 'regional identity' linking the two former. Since a wheel can turn, the metaphor also refers to the dynamic (movements) created by the reuse of heritage.

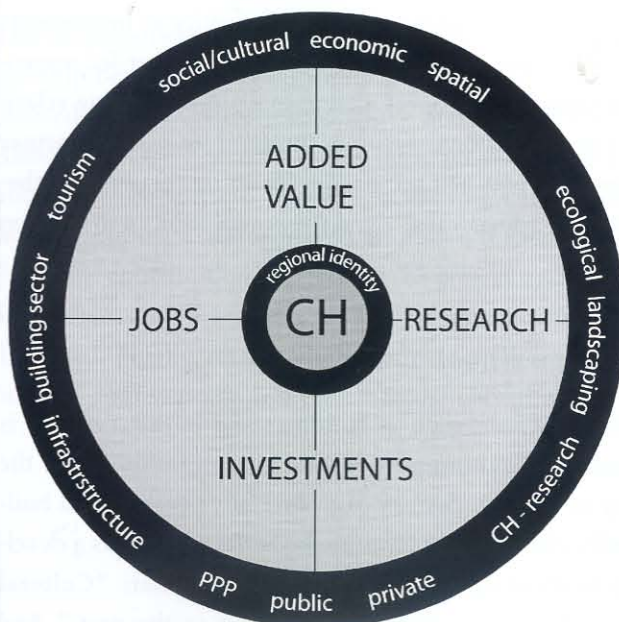


Figure 1 The wheel of Cultured (Cultured, 2007).

Similar to other wheels, the 'Wheel of Cultured' is composed of a central hub, spokes and the tyre. A specific element in between the central hub and the connection of the spokes to the hub makes the wheel turn smoothly.

The core or central hub of the wheel is formed by built 'cultural heritage' (CH), since this is the central issue within the Cultured project. As spokes are important for the solidity of a wheel, the four spokes or elements of the Cultured-wheel are building blocks to ensure strong regional development: creating 'jobs', attracting 'investments', stimulating 'research' and, as an overall result, providing 'added value' due to the reuse of cultural heritage. While the hub and spokes of the wheel decide what the cultural heritage project is about, the 'Wheel of Cultured' also takes into account external conditions such as policy and legislation. The black tyre at the outline of the wheel represents a variety of different policy fields that interface with cultural heritage and regional development. Finally, cultural heritage is embedded in and contributes to regional identity. A clear regional identity - existing or wished for - seems to be an essential catalyst for regional development or the element that makes the wheel turn smoothly. Cultural heritage is just one, however important, element in formulating regional identity. As with a real wheel, removing or misplacing elements has a consequence for the well-functioning of the 'Wheel of Cultured'. On the other hand, spokes can be added to strengthen the wheel, for example representing the role of media and communication in the process of reusing cultural heritage.

There are of course many ways to visualise and illustrate the relationships between cultural heritage, regional development and identity. The purpose of the 'Wheel of Cultured' is to focus on a limited number of key issues rather than providing a metaphor demonstrating all the ingredients for regional development.

3.2. Regional identity as interface between cultural heritage and regional development

It is often due to the preservation of cultural heritage elements that regions have unique characteristics. On the other hand, the intention of a region to create a certain identity can be very important for regional development (Castells, 1996) and should be taken into account when developing a strategy for reuse of its cultural heritage features. This explains why the Cultured-project has strongly emphasised the importance of regional identity in the reuse of cultural heritage in relation to regional development. In the context of the project, having to communicate between 14 partners, 'regional identity' was made operational as the sum of three aspects (see also Herengreen, 2002; Simon, 2004):

- Each individual has her/his opinion about the identity of a place or a region. Consequently, regional identity can have various meanings for every individual. On the other hand, to some extent, people will agree on the same thing, for instance on the attractiveness of an open landscape or historical city centre. In these circumstances, a group of people creates a common understanding of what identity means to them. Regional identity is, in other words, clearly a man-made construction and can therefore be changed by man if necessary.
- Regarding a region's profile, identity implies uniqueness compared to other regions in its physical, social and economic characteristics. But people can also feel related to a region even when it does not consist of unique characteristics. The 'normal way of doing things' and activities that take place on a day-to-day basis can also shape a region's profile.
- Finally, the identity of a region is strongly influenced by the existing activities, know how and specialisations that generate income for a region. Loss of the need for certain activities

in a region is often the starting point for complex transformation processes, especially in rather mono-oriented regions, for instance former industrial or mining areas. One possible way to gain insight in the existing know how in a region is to distinguish different knowledge fields, since each region consists of a unique combination of knowledge fields such as product knowledge, market knowledge, expert knowledge, local knowledge, institutional knowledge and environmental knowledge.

4. Application of the Cultured-wheel

One of the tracks in the Cultured knowledge exchange project was the presentation by the project partners of so-called 'demonstration projects' on the reuse of built cultural heritage, originating from their own daily practices. The 'Wheel of Cultured' allowed a formatted synthesis of information for each of the ten demonstration projects on job creation, investments, research and added value and an assessment whether these four elements of the wheel were in balance. Hereby, the balance of the four aspects was considered to be of the utmost importance, independent of the actual size and scale of the demonstration project.

To objectify the assessment of the demonstration projects, a quantitative metric scale was set up for the four main elements of the Cultured-wheel. This scale was linked to measuring units in a scoring system (table 1). A maximum score for each of the four elements of the Cultured-wheel as well as an equal distribution of a low score on each of the spokes were considered to refer to a well-balanced demonstration project.

Table 1 Scoring system for the assessment of demonstration projects. (Cultured, 2007).

Spoke of wheel	Measuring unit	Point
Jobs	Jobs = (quantitative) numbers/direct and indirect	
	1-10	1
	10-100	2
	>100	3
	indirect jobs	1
	(qualitative) sustainability of jobs	1
	voluntary work	1
Investments	Investments = amount of (planned) investments	
	1-100.000 euro	1
	100.000-1.000.000 euro	2
	1.000.000-10.000.000 euro	3
	>10.000.000 euro	4
	indirect, e.g. surrounding area	1
	mix of private, public and EU funding	1

Research	Research = knowledge and studies	
	new and innovative knowledge fields	1
	feasibility	1
	historic/basic research related to project	1
	new technologies (e.g. for new materials)	1
	permanent education, training	1
	several aspects covered (includes e.g. landscape context)	1
Added value	Added value = value through investments in heritage	
	economic benefit: financial return	1
	entrepreneurship	1
	social benefit	1
	cultural benefit (e.g. newly set up organisations)	1
	spatial benefit (e.g. new spatial patterns, improved spatial quality, local scale, but also local scale extending/flagship character)	1
	ecological benefit	1

While assessing the ten demonstration projects, it became clear that the emphasis on the four spokes of the wheel changes during the process of valorisation of cultural heritage. The start-up phase of a reuse project will probably focus more on research and short-term job creation and will also imply a short-term added value. In a later stage of the process, investments often become more important and more sustainable jobs are created. This also implies more and other added value. In other words, the assessment of projects through the Cultured-wheel must be interpreted in the time perspective of process management.

Afterwards, During (2008) has criticised the Cultured-wheel as an (“interesting”) example of ‘auto-poiesis’, referring to Luhmann’s social system theory (Luhmann, 1995). According to During (2008), the wheel metaphor in the Cultured-project resulted in a filtering of the diversity in opinions between partners on the efficiency of investments in cultural heritage. This filtering process is in itself not problematic, but it also implies a kind of introvert culture or idea deciding what cultural heritage is and how it should be dealt with in policy making, or that information is filtered through distinctions and concepts that are used to understand and to give meaning to the world. However, his correct criticism seems not at all exclusive for the Cultured-project but raises questions about all policy making and spatial planning since categorisations and conceptualisations are fundamentally inherent to these activities (see also Van Assche and Leinfelder, 2008).

5. Assessment of demonstration projects

Applying the 'Wheel of Cultured' to the ten demonstration projects of the Cultured-project (table 2) allowed for some conclusions.

Table 2 Assessment of demonstration projects. (Cultured, 2007)

Demonstration project	Elements of Cultured-wheel			
	Jobs	Investments	Research	Added value
Restoration and reuse of Herkenrode Abbey (B)	10-100 (2) indirect (1) sustainable (1)	>10.000.000 (4) private (1)	historic (1) education (1)	econ/tourism(1) cultural (1)
	4	5	2	2
Conservation-led renewal & environmental design in course in Blaenavon (GB)	>100 (3) indirect (1) sustainable (1) volunteer (1)	1-10.000.000 (3) mix (1)	feasibility (1) new mat (1) historic (1) education (1)	economic (1) entrepren. (1) cultural (1) spatial (1)
	6	4	4	4
Awareness for thatched houses in Cork region (IRL)	indirect (1)	1-100.000 (1)	landscape (1) historic (1) education (1)	cultural (1) spatial (1)
	1	1	3	2
Small-scale businesses at former bullet factory in Pistoia (I)	>100 (3) sustainable (1)	>10.000.000 (4) private (1)	historic (1) feasibility (1)	economic (1) entrepren. (1) cultural (1)
	4	5	2	2
Tourism and vineyard-based entrepreneurship in Somogy (H)	10-100 (2) sustainable (1)	100.000-1.000.000 (2) indirect (1) mix (1)	feasibility (1) education/business centre (1)	econ/tourism(1) cultural (1) entrepren. (1)
	3	4	2	3
Tourism potential of soviet heritage in Kurzeme region (LV)	10-100 (2) volunteer (1)	1-100.000 (1) mix (1)	feasibility (1)	econ/tourism(1) entrepren. (1)
	3	2	1	2
New life at Fortress of Asperen and vicinity (NL)	1-10 (1) sustainable (1) volunteer (1)	>10.000.000 (4) indirect (1) mix (1)	historic (1) feasibility (1) several (1)	econ/tourism(1) entrepren. (1) ecological (1) spatial (1)
	3	6	3	4
Rediscovery of public space in Ubeda and Bunol/Valencia (E)	10-100 (2) indirect (1) sustainable (1) volunteer (1)	>10.000.000 (4) indirect (1)	historic (1) new mat (1) education (1) several (1)	econ/tourism(1) social (1) spatial (1) cultural (1) ecological (1)
	5	5	4	5
Restoration and reuse of traditional flour windmills in Mallorca (E)	1-10 (1) sustainable (1)	100.000-1.000.000 (2) mix (1)	historic (1) new mat (1) education (1)	econ/tourism(1) cultural (1)
	2	3	3	2
Narrow gauge railway and Rokis-kis Manor in Panevezys (LT)	10-100 (2) sustainable (1) volunteer (1)	100.000-1.000.000 (2) mix (1)	historic (1) feasibility (1)	econ/tourism(1) social (1) spatial (1)
	4	3	2	3

Each of the demonstration projects is clearly set with the ambition of creating jobs for the region, more or less closely related to the valorisation of cultural heritage. The average number of expected jobs lies in between 10 and 50 jobs, depending on the ambitions of the project. Most of the direct jobs are situated in the recreation and tourism sector. Direct job creation also takes place in other business sectors such as small/medium sized enterprises. More indirect jobs, such as catering and recreational entrepreneurs, are created due to the presence of cultural heritage in the region.

The demonstration projects generally attract rather high investments. These include investments for restoration and to develop parts of the cultural heritage to make it useful for new activities or functions. The demonstration projects illustrate that high investments result in the creation of larger added value, in particular economic benefits. Funding for these necessary investments comes from different sources. Most funding originates from national and regional sources, besides European financing.

Research played a role in the development and valorisation of local cultural heritage in all demonstration projects. Almost every partner undertook a feasibility study to investigate the future added value. Also in every project, more or less historical research was carried out to better understand the historical context and the identity of the place/region. Doing so, the identity of the site or region was better recognised, not only by experts but also by visitors and locals. Some research has also been done for more tangible purposes such as new restoration techniques or ecological protection measures. Generally, research is the aspect with the largest opportunities for improvement in the demonstration projects: greater attention for research and additional knowledge could have a positive impact on the regional awareness of the present cultural heritage.

The assessment also shows that the added value as a result of cultural heritage valorisation in a region could be improved in most demonstration projects. Economic added value is achieved in almost every project; especially tourism-related initiatives play a key role. Social and cultural benefits are often obvious, but could be exploited more, for instance the interest of local people for cultural heritage, the preservation of local traditions and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. There are also insufficiently used opportunities for an increase of return on investments.

An evaluation of the balance between the four elements of the cultured-wheel shows that some projects (Lithuania, Ireland, Mallorca and Ubeda/Bunol) appear to achieve a reasonable balance while others don't. This is not necessarily negative since these are all long-term projects and the focus on the different elements can change throughout the process. However, one should be aware of the fact that the four elements are closely linked and that paying little or no attention at all to one or more of the elements will diminish the impact on the long-term goals of regional and local development. Finally, it should be kept in mind that investing in cultural heritage is only one strategy to achieve regional development goals and that for other specific problems in a region, other tools than the valorisation of cultural heritage will be needed and used.

6. Recommendations

Based on the assessment of and knowledge exchange about the ten demonstration projects, five recommendations on how to set up and develop a successful project on the reuse of built heritage and fourteen recommendations for policy makers on the role of built heritage as an engine for regional development were formulated at the end of the Cultured-project. These recommendations are briefly discussed.

A first recommendation for the development of a successful cultural heritage project is that it should contribute to regional identity, respecting the context of value. Important points of attention in this context are to define valid reasons for the selection of a particular project or theme, to identify the characteristics of the region and to critically assess and reflect on regional identity throughout the whole process.

Secondly, the cultural heritage project has to be embedded in a broader strategy and to fit into and take into account current legislation. As a consequence, it is necessary to make a limitative list of the juridical conditions in which the project will be developed and to consider this juridical context not simply as an annoying disadvantage, but as a potentially constructive element. Attention should also be drawn to adjust the heritage project to local needs within the context of regional development and to link it with modern mobility patterns.

Another recommendation for cultural heritage projects is to integrate new ideas into old buildings by designing a flexible and reversible project development approach, by estimating short- and long-term effects of materials and techniques for restoration, by making a well-balanced choice between reuse and authenticity, by setting up an innovative approach to reach users at different levels and from various backgrounds and by ensuring that the heritage stays alive and prosperous.

Fourth recommendation is that cultural heritage projects should generate income and contribute to the long-term sustainable development of the region. Important in this context are the necessary financial means for the start and development of the project, a solid and broad (more than economic) prediction of long-term direct and indirect added value, the contribution of the project to the concept of the 'learning region', the transferability of the project, the increase and the assurance of public interest in cultural heritage and the attention to create added value in each phase of the project.

Finally, the reuse of cultural heritage also implies to bring closer together many different partners and organisations in the region. This requires an adequate organisation structure, permanent dialogue with and formal commitments of partners, a striving for a regional bottom-up approach and the active involvement of the public.

The Cultured-project finally states that policy makers should know that the reuse of cultural heritage really can be an engine for regional development, through job creation, the stimulation of research and knowledge, the attraction of new investments, when certain conditions are met.

Policy conditions allowing for the conservation and reuse of cultural heritage should for instance become one of the major objectives, not only in the heritage policy field itself but also in other policy fields. Legislation should be more oriented towards heritage valorisation instead of merely focusing on protection and conservation issues. Furthermore, it is important to know that a critical mass of users will be reached when a certain scale and impact of the project can be expected, when the expectations and objectives that are linked to the cultural heritage object are clear and when heritage policy also includes active community involvement stimulating bottom-up initiatives. If possible, there should be a balance between the current needs and requests for reuse and the ambition for maximum authenticity and the project should include a number of innovative elements. The best guarantee for these conditions is that a trained staff is carrying out the cultural heritage valorisation project and the final, perhaps most important condition is to be aware of the fact that cultural heritage policy is a dynamic rather than a static policy. Cultural heritage policy changes constantly due to changes in people's backgrounds, interests and needs.

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Dit Liber Amicorum werd samengesteld ter gelegenheid van de afscheidsviering van Prof. Dr. Marc Antrop, die zijn activiteiten aan de Universiteit Gent beëindigde op 1 januari 2009.

Marc legde een weg af van onderwijzer tot gewoon hoogleraar aan onze Alma Mater. Tijdens zijn academische loopbaan (1970-2008) verdiepte hij zich met overgave in uiteenlopende onderzoeksdomeinen, zoals landschapskunde, landschapsecologie, regionale en historische geografie, landschapsarchitectuur en -planning, ruimtelijke planning, milieu-effectrapportering, waarbij hij telkens gebruik maakte van technieken uit de ruimtelijke analyse, teledetectie en GIS. Deze verschillende benaderingen kwamen ook aan bod in de cursussen die hij doceerde aan de Universiteit Gent, de VUB, en tijdens internationale master- en PhD-cursussen, waarbij hij de studenten inspireerde en onderdompelde in zijn holistische kijk naar landschap. Bovendien speelde hij een sleutelrol bij het ontwikkelen van de vakdidactiek voor het geografie-onderwijs. Hij combineerde zijn onderwijs- en onderzoekstaken gedurende 13 jaar met het voorzitterschap van de Vakgroep Geografie aan de Universiteit Gent (1995-2008).

Zijn onderzoek resulteerde in tal van nationale en internationale publicaties. Momenteel is hij associated editor van "Landscape Ecology" en zetelt hij in het redactiecomité van verschillende internationale wetenschappelijke tijdschriften. Als academicus is hij actief lid van een aantal nationale en internationale organisaties.

Hij werkt als expert eveneens beleidsondersteunend en was promotor van talrijke onderzoeksprojecten in Vlaanderen. Zo tekende hij de kaart van de traditionele landschappen en was hij een voortrekker bij de opmaak van de Landschapsatlas van Vlaanderen, die een belangrijk instrument voor het Vlaamse landschapsbeleid is geworden. Sinds 1996 is hij ondervoorzitter van de Koninklijke Commissie voor Monumenten en Landschappen. Daarnaast was hij secretaris van het Nationaal Comité voor Geografie en voorzitter van het Wetenschappelijk Comité GIS-Vlaanderen en de GI-raad Vlaanderen. Internationaal neemt hij actief deel aan workshops over de implementatie van de Europese Landschapsconventie (Raad van Europa).

Tijdens zijn carrière werd hij meermaals gevierd. In 2003 ontving hij de Distinguished Scholarship Award op de IALE World Conference in Darwin. In 2007 werd hij Doctor honoris causa aan de Universiteit van Tartu (Estland).

Maar bovenal hebben velen Marc Antrop leren kennen als een boeiende persoonlijkheid die een grote professionaliteit met een warme menselijkheid weet te combineren.

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